

A Brief Answer to three very great and concerning Questions.

There are at this day three great Questions which if they were rightly stated, and thoroughly resolved, they would serve very much to confirm the minds of Believers, in an active discharge of those duties which the present season requies from them, or else quiet and compole their spirits if they are called to suffer.

THe first question is concerning the Ministers of the Gospel (I mean such as are otherwise rightly qualified to preach as being gifted by God, and called by the people) but are forbid by the Civil Magistrate to exercise that office, the question concerning them is whether in obedience to the commands of the civil Magistrate they are to forbear preaching or not.

I answer, by no means and that,

Ans. 1.

First, from the example of our Saviour and his Apostles, who though they were as subject to the Law, as we are now, and injoyed obedience to all the lawful commands of civil Magistrates, yet when ever the civil Authority was abused to hinder preaching they did constantly refuse to obey them.

Thus our Saviour, who as man behaved himself wisely [a] and commands all his followers to do so, yet in his preaching he did not walk by those rules of secrecie and concealment which are now accounted prudential for when he was questioned concerning his Doctrine he answered [a] I spake openly, or freely, boldly, plainly, for so the word *παρρησια* is often rendred) to the

[a] *Isa.*
52. 13.

[6] *Mat.*
10.

[a] *Job.*
18. 20.

World, I ever taught in the Synagogue and in the Temple, whither the Jews always resort and in secret I have said nothing; thus did our Saviour really, what is figuratively (but with respect to him) spoken concerning wisdom, [b] wisdom cryeth without boasting her words in the streets & this preaching in publick our Saviour maketh to be one great part of doing his Fathers will [c] 40. v. 9, I have said he in that Prophetical Psalm, preached righteousness in the great congregation; Lo, I have not refrained my lips, O Lord; thou knowest I have not hid thy righteousness within my heart I have declared thy faithfulness and thy salvation, I have not concealed thy loving kindness and thy truth from the great congregation.

In order to the fulfilling this Prophecy it is very remarkable that our Saviour began his Ministry at that very time, when, and in that very place, where John was cast into Prison; which circumstance is observed by 2 of the Evangelists after that [d] Mark 1. v. 14. John was cast into Prison, (saith Mark) [d] Jesus came into Galilee. (which was under the Jurisdiction and command of Herod, [e] Luke 3. v. 19. who had newly imprisoned John, preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom of God, and from that time (saith Mat) [f] i. e. From the time of Johns Imprisonment Jesus began to Preach, thereby [f] Mat. 4. 12. 17 shewing in his own example that no danger should discourage a Gospel-Preacher from the discharge of his duty.

What our Saviour did himself he doth likewise advise his Disciples unto and therefore in that very Chapter [g] where [g] Mat. 1. 10. he sent them forth to preach though he directs them to beware of men [n] and to be wise as Serpents, yet withall he commands [b] 4. 6. them, to preach publickly, what I say to you saith he, in the dark 3. 7. do you speak in the light and what you hear in the ear publish on the house top and as foreseeing that the Disciples might raise some objections against this because of the certain danger and hazard that would attend such a practice our Saviour doth no less then three times expressly command them [a] not to be afraid [a] Mat. 10. 26. of them that only kill the body, whereby mentioning the worst 28. 31; /

and utmost that men can do in a way of opposition, he doth sufficiently arm his ministers against lesser difficulties; and to shew that he did not leave the duty of preaching publickly unto his Apostles liberty, as a thing they might do or forbear as they pleased, he makes it afterwards to be a part of their *confessing* him [b] which he requireth as an indispensible duty from all [b] v. 33 his followers; and accordingly when the Apostles (after the descent of the holy Spirit, upon them) were commanded to be silent, by the High Priests, and to Preach no more, [c] in the [c] Act, Name of Christ. 4. v. 19.

Though the Persons which injoynd this were their lawful magistrates yet they absolutely refused to submit unto them; and upon the account of an Argument, which is still of equal force, if it be righteous before God, say they, to obey you rather than God, judge ye, for we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard; and afterwards when they assembled together, they did not pray, either for the favour of the Magistrates, or for wisdom to conceal themselves or for their own preservation; but appeal unto God to be a righteous Judge between their rulers and them; and for themselves, do beg nothing but courage to discharge their duty, and now, say they, O Lord look upon their threats and give unto thy Servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy words. In which Prayer, is being agreeable to the will of God, they were presently heard and answered, for they were filled with the Holy Spirit, and as an effect thereof they spake the word of God with boldness: The same Prayer and for the same ends doth the Apostle Paul desire the Ephesians, to make for him when he was in Prison Praying [d] saith he for me (not that I may be released from my bonds and sit at liberty, but) that utterance [d] Eph. 6. 19. 20. may be given to me by the opening of my mouth with boldness to make known the Mystery of the Gospel; that I may be bold therein, as I ought to speak, and in his advice to Timothy whom he instructs as a Pattern of all following Teachers he exhorts him to stir up the gift that was in him (the meaning of which advice is as he him-

[a] 2 self explains it in another place [a] *preach the word be instant in*
Time *season, out of season reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all manner of*
v. 2. *long suffering and Doctrine; for which Assiduity and diligence in*
 [b] 2 *Preaching, he gives a reason which holds true and binding in*
Time c. 1. *all Ages, [b] because God hath not given to us (whether we are*
v. 7, 8. *believers or preachers) the spirit of fear but of power, and there-*
 [c] 2 *fore we now, as well as the Apostles afore us, are not to be asha-*
Time 2. *med of the testimony of the Lord, but to suffer hardship with the*
1. 2. *Gospel according to the power of God [c] as good Soldiers of Jesus*
Christ.

R. 2. Secondly, another Argument may be taken from the Nature
 of a Gospel Ministry, which, to whomever it is committed, is to be
 looked upon as an office, a stewardship and to be managed as a
 trust, for a faithful discharge of which they are to be strictly
 [d] Cor. accountable [d] *Let a Man, (i. e. let every one) so account of us*
4. c. 1. 2. *(saith the Apostle Paul, meaning himself and other Preachers*
of the Gospel in his time) as Ministers of Christ and stewards of
the Mysteries of God; now as the same Apostles adds what is requi-
red of stewards, is that they be found faithful; but to be faithfull, is
not to lay up our Lords Money, but to lay it out, and to Trade
with it for our Masters advantage; thus are we all commanded

[e] Prr. 1. to deal with spiritual gifts [e] *every one as he hath received a gift*
4. v. 10. *Minister thereof to one another as good stewards of the manifold*
grace of God; and this the Apostle Paul makes to be his warrant

[f] 1 C. and apology why he was so laborious and constant in preach-
9. v. *ing [f] for saith he if I Preach the Gospel, I have nothing to boast off,*
16. 17. *because a necessity lyeth upon me; yea there is a woe unto me if I preach*
not the Gospel, because I am intrusted with a stewardship. As Moses
was faithfull in all Gods house, which is mentioned by God him-

[g] Num. self [g] and afterwards repeated by the Apostle as his highest
12. v. 7. *commendation; so are all those to be, whom God hath been*
pleated to honour with calling them to be his Servants in that
work, then not their own ease, safety or Profit, but their
Masters honour and intrest is to be consulted by them, which
 none

none can faithfully attend, who either sloathfully imprison their light or cowardly desert their station.

Thirdly, another Argument may be taken from the nature of *R. 3.*
Preaching gifts, which increase by using; they are like the *Widdows Oyl*, which while it stood in the Vessel had no increase, but multiplied, as it was pouring out: Grain in the floor doth not enrich the earth, but when it is Sown, it prospers to an Harvest: as a spring if you stop its Current will presently be choaked up; or a fire when you leave off blowing goes out; so is it with spiritual gifts, which in this respect as well as others are compared to Fire and Water, b. cause they must be kept up in a continual exercise or else we are in danger of losing them [a] *the manifestation of the Spirit*, (i. e. that gift whatever it is whereby the Spirit of God doth manifest it self to act in any) is given to profit (not our selves principally but others) withall: and therefore we are commanded [b] to excel that we may benefit the Church, [c] *which end when it is not religiously designed, and attended to* we may fear that our talent shall be taken away, as it was from the evil and the sloathful servant, whereas he that useth what he hath received hath the promise of a Blessing, [c] and shall be made to abound so much the more as he goeth through greater difficulties in the exercise and imployment of his Talent. *(c) Mat. 25. v. 28.*

Lastly since our Lord Christ hath called all such, as are truly Gospel Ministers, unto that work, and hath promised to be with them and to assist them in it, there can be nothing more dishonourable to his power and authority then to decline any part of the Duty we owe to him, for fear of men; for our Lord is a great King, & as he is able to defend, so he hath promised that he will amply reward all his faithful servants; he knows all our works and who they are that call themselves Jews or Christians that are not such but rather the Synagogue of Sathan, it is from such as these, nominal Christians but real Devils, that all our sufferings in the last days are to be expected, who make use of the name and

and of the form of godliness with the greater dexterity, and advantage to oppose and persecute the power of it; and yet even these he hath commanded us not to fear, though they may prevail to deliver us into Prisons and unto death; yet we are not to fear, any of these things we may suffer, because our Lord Christ who was dead, now lives for ever, and will give all his witnesses a Crown of Life. In expectation of which recompence we should daily triumph and rejoyce, whereas to do or forbear doing any thing, in religious concerns, meerly that we may avoid persecutions, argues a poor, low, and ungospel-like Spirit; as the Apostle observes in those Conformists in his time, who preached up Circumcision and legal Ceremonies he saith they did it meerly, [a] that they might not be persecuted with the Cross of Christ whereas were we Christians indeed we should as he professeth he did glory in nothing more then the Cross of Christ and in our Conformity to that by which the World would be crucified to us, and we unto the Terrors and allurements of the World: And so much to the first Question.

(a) Gal.
6. v. 12.
14.

Que.

The second Question is, whether believers in order to the more solemn serving of God, and their mutual edification, are bound to continue their assembling together, when the civil Magistrate doth expressly prohibit such kind of meetings; this question, though it may seem sufficiently decided by the answer given unto the other, for if it be the duty of Ministers to preach, it must necessarily follow that it is the peoples duty to hear; if the Shepherd, to the utmost hazard of his Life, must go before; then certainly the sheep must follow after, and hearken to his voice, yet because of those distinctions and shifts which carnal fear hath found out, under the notion of christian prudence I shall speak more fully for the affirming of it.

Ans. I.

First. The Apostle doth expressly command that Believers should not forsake ἐπισυναγωγῇ assembling or gathering together into one place (as the Greek word properly signifies) but be daily admonishing one another and so much the more as they saw the day,
i. e.

(i. e. the evil day of persecution and distress, approaching [a] *(a) Hobi.*
 where he is so far from making the persecution then coming, *10. v. 29.*
 upon them (of which he speaketh and against which, he incou-
 rageth them in the following chapter) to be a motive for the
 forbearing of meetings; that he useth it, as an argument to
 quicken them unto greater diligence and frequency therein;
 and according to this command so was the Practice of the Pri-
 mitive Christians, for as soon as ever they were converted they
 did not think it sufficient to keep their Religion to themselves, *(b) Act.*
 and to serve God in private but [b] *Continued constant unto the* *2. 42.*
Teaching and fellowship of the Apostles, and that not only before *(c) Act. 5.*
 but after the Apostles were by publick authority silenced, *(c)* *v. 12. 13.*
 for then all (i. e. all the converts) were with one accord toge-
 ther in Solomons Porch, which congregating together is made a
 distinctive note and Character of a true Disciple, for it is said
 of the rest, (who were not Disciples) *no man durst joyn himself un-*
to them. Arg 2.

Secondly, By assembling themselves, thus in time
 of persecution our Lord Christ is greatly honoured
 for hereby we give an evidence that we confesse and are not asha-
 med of him, which is a thing he doth very often. xpresly call for
 and he takes especial notice who they are in defiling and dan-
 gerous times that keep constantly and meet often together to
 serve him, the place in *Malachy* (d) is well known and for this
 we find he commends the *Church of Pergamus* (e) I know saith he
 thy works and where thou dwellest where Sathn hath his Throne, (by
 which is meant the persecuting Heathen Magistrate who had
 there his residence and published his Devilish Decrees) and
 thou holdest fast my Name; and hast not denied my Faith, and be-
 cause separation from all such Churches, or Assembly's, which
 call themselves Jews or Christians, and are not doth necessarily
 draw persecution along with it, therefore doth he command in
 the same Chapter all those whom he foresaw were likely to
 be thrown into Prison, and there exercised with many tryals
 not to fear; because he laid there sufferings to heart; and that
 con-

constancy which did so visibly redound to his honour he would not fail fully to reward; in backsliding times the love of most to the strict ways of holiness doth wax cold, and proportionably their Hatred against true professors and followers of it, doth increase and then God seems to say as *Moses* did to the revolted *Israelites*

- (a) *Ex.* 32. 26. *Who is on my side*; let them come together and shew themselves; for the *Saints* are said to be the glory of *Christ*, (b) and that especially in the *Church Assemblies*, which is meant by the prophet when he saith upon all the Glory *i. e.* upon all the assemblies of *Sion*, or of the true Church shall be a defence, and all their sufferings which may befall them, for such well doing, are ordered on purpose by *Christ* that in the issue he may have glory by them, for we, saith the Apostle *Paul* are always delivered up unto death, for the sake of *Jesus*, that the life *(i. e.* the living power) of *Jesus* may be manifested in our mortal flesh and so the Apostle *Peter* to the same purpose (c) now if need be you are put to sorrow by divers temptations that the tryall of your faith may be found to honour and praise and glory, at the Revelation of *Jesus Christ*, and again in another place in as much as ye are partakers in the suffering of *Christ* rejoyce that at the Revelation of his Glory, ye may joy with exceeding gladness because then the Spirit of God, and of glory doth rest upon you and on your part is glorified.

Arg. 3. Thirdly, This is the best way to convince and silence the gain-saying and contradicting World, and likewise put to shame those false and pretended brethren, who (as the Apostle speaks in the case of circumcision) would have us to forbear meetings meely (f) that they may glory in our flesh, and triumph in our fear and cowardise; as when the Centurion saw the Earthquake and the dreadful Eclipse at our Saviours death, and above all when he heard his voice with so much security and confidence committing himself to God, he presently cried out (g) assuredly this man was the Son of God, so when hypocritical professors and worldly spirited opposers do see the courage and constancy of the Saints in keeping together, though Earthquakes

quakes and Tumults are round about them, they will then be forced to acknowledge that they are the sincere worshippers of the true God; as (a) *Nebuchadnezzar* did concerning the 3 *Chil-* (a) *Dan.*
~~Men~~ who boldly disobeyed his impious decree, and *Darius* con- 3.28.29
 concerning *Daniel*, who would not omit the circumstance of ha-
 ving his windows open when he prayed, notwithstanding the Law
 against it. It is in General the end of all *Christian meetings* to
 convince *Unbelievers*, and to bring them to confesse that; (b) God (b) 1 *Cor.*
 is in us of a truth, but to meet for the Worship of God, only 14.v.24.
 when the men of the World do give us leave, must needs 25.
 make them think that we are in all respects like themselves, and
 that our Religion stands in need of their countenance and favour
 to uphold it; But (c) to hold forth (or as the word *inixen* fig- (c) *Phil.*
 nifieth to hold up on high) the word of truth, as a light, when the 6.1.v.2.
 storm and wind is blowing in our faces; to keep out in our ship
 at Sea, in the midst of a tempest without seeking for shelter in
 some obscure and ignoble harbour, it will draw the eyes of
 Unbelievers towards us, and make them confesse that [d] ano- (d) 1 *Joh.*
 ther Spirit acts in us when acts in them; which Spirit is the 44.6.
 proper principle of a Believer, not only that with constitutes
 and makes him one, but which doth vholly difference him from
 the men of the World.

Fourthly, the more dangerous and distressing the day is, the Arg. 4.
 more need have we of all manner of helps to quicken and incou-
 rage us; and therefore assembling is most necessary in persecuting
 times; as in Winter we kindle greater fires, and in dark Nights
 light up more Candles, so in the sharp Weather of persecution
 we should get most of all together that we may keep one ano-
 ther warm; the Apostle *Paul* though animated by frequent visi-
 ons, yet (e) when he saw the Brethren in his Journey to Rome he took (e) *Acts*
 new courage. We stand in our present frail composition of flesh & 28.25.
 blood so related and indebted to one another; that oftentimes
 the company even of those that are inferior in Grace unto our
 selves, doth prove a very great strengthening, and therefore *Gideon*
 though

though acknowledged by God himself to be a *Mighty Man of Valour*, and who had newly had 2 signall Miracles to confirm him, yet being afraid to go down alone into the Camp of the *Midianites*, he is commanded by God (f) to take his *Servant Ruth* with him, and our Saviour himself, when he was [a] in his last and greatest agony, requests his Disciples to tarry and to watch with him, as it were to relieve him with their Society and Sympathy. Thus the Apostle *Paul* after all his Revelations and Raptures, frequently desires those unto whom he writes, [b] to be *very earnest in their prayers unto God for him*, and when *Titus* and *Timothy*, came to him from *Macedonia* it was such a Revival to him that it is observed how he was upon it, [c] *strengthened in Spirit*, and testified to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ; the coming of 2 such dear Friends, made the holy Apostle to recollect all his inward powers and with a redoubled vehemence and intention to perform his Ministry. And therefore to seek & the assistance which the seeing of one anothers faces, and hearing one anothers words, may help to bring us in times of distress, this is only to betray our selves, and to throw away our succours, when we stand most in need of them.

Arg. 5. Lastly when the Saints meet together in obedience to the command and will of God they have a more immediate title to his protection, it is upon the *Glory*, that is, upon the *publick assemblies of Zion*, that the defence is promised to be; the whole *World*, which *lieth in evil* (or rather in the evil one) is a kind of a wast, a wilderness, in which the Devil walks & rules; but the Church is a *Garden inclosed* and God himself hath promised to *Water and Fence it* (d) and therefore whoever touch it in an *Hostile and violent manner* are in certain danger of being ruined and destroyed themselves; when the Saints of old were but few in number and in a wandering condition God would not then suffer even Kings to hurt them, for not King as some daily expound that text but the saints are Gods anointed ones, for whom he careth; and if he would not suffer them to be wronged, when they were

were but few, much less will he permit it when they are many and united: the Israel of God, and such are all true worshippers, shall not be wasted without the inevitable overthrow of all their oppressors, because God himself hath promised to be *(f)* *Wall of* *(f)* *Zach.* *fire, and about them, nay oftentimes those Wolves and Beasts* *2. 5. 8.* *of prey, who sought to devour them, are so far disappointed, that God hath promised to strengthen his despised people, to return their recompence upon their heads, and to execute his Vengeance upon them; thus God threatneth Edom, who was a false and cruel Brother unto Israel [g] I will lay my vengeance upon Edom, by* *(g)* *Ex.* *the hand of my people Israel, and they shall do in Edom according to* *25. v. 14.* *my anger, and according to my fury, and they shall know my vengeance; our Lord Christ amongst other titles of care and affection is called the Shepherd of his people, and his Sheep are likely to have most of his care, and eye, when they are most together; to be scattered is a great Judgement, and is oftentimes threatned as one, for it makes us lyable to become a prey unto any that is desirous to take us; and therefore let none by any act of theirs, in withdrawing from their Flocks & proper resting places, seem willing to put themselves into that condition; but wait on the Lord and keep his way, (a) and then they may comfortably expect what* *(a)* *Psal* *follows that the Lord will exalt them to inherit the earth & when* *37. v. 34* *the wicked are cut off they shall see it, nay perhaps God will honour them to be his Instruments therein; or this is promised as an honour to all his Saints, Psal. 149. And so much for the second Question.*

There remains a Third Question, and that is, whether upon the Banishment, Imprisonment or death of the faithful and suffering preachers of the Gospel, others who in their very entrance into the Ministry do subscribe themselves the unfeigned Servants of Men are to be heard, but this is of so easie a solution that whoever are rightly satisfied about the 2 former may easily resolve themselves

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